



A **SEVTON** STORY

REGINALD ROUTHWICK

LUCKY GUESS



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A CONSTITUTION BOOK

*For Aunty Baba and Mr. Elwin (in Dominica),
and the entire staff at Writer's Digest (in Cincinnati).
Where would I be now without you guys?*

*To Harold Smith (1926-2005), and his family too...
May we keep on looking.*

ROGATIA

53° W

ELMSHIRE

Transport		Elevation	
Roads			
3H (Motorway)		600 m / 1969 ft	
R (Routes)		500 m / 1640 ft	
S (Secondary)		400 m / 1312 ft	
Airports		300 m / 984 ft	
		200 m / 656 ft	
		100 m / 328 ft	
		0	
Settlements		Natural Features	
National Capital (Shropshire Seat)		Points (heights in meters)	
Elmsshire Seat		Cliffides	
City Areas		Rivers	
Town Areas			



If you need the money, you could get the money fairly easy. You could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten. I mean, it's not easy, but it could be done.

*But the question is: who [on earth] would handle it?
Any ideas on that?*

—Richard Nixon, March 1973
(as told to John Dean)

Hope, and hopelessness, persist despite the facts.
—Mason Cooley, 1984

A LITTLE STASH OF ARTWORK had gone a long, long way. But where to?

“They received word on 3MJ,” Roberta told Diane at the *Ambassade*. “That’s what you heard those Belgian ladies chatting on.”

“What’s 3MJ, huh?”

“I’ll give you three guesses,” she said. “Nothin’ more, nothin’ less.”

As usual, reasoned Diane. “Luxury Audi model?”

“No.”

“Microchip?”

Roberta nodded no.

“Hummel figurine? Soul singer?”

“Non’ of da ’bove, Miss.”

“Well, what is it then?”

“Stop asking, O.K.? You’re not in any hurry,” shouted Roberta, before checking in at her mother’s workspace. “I’ll show you when I get back.” While in wait, Diane twiddled her thumbs and whistled to herself like a hummingbird, wondering whether Navajo troops ever recruited the girl’s grandparents to begin with. *They lectured us on that lon’ ’go, din’t dey? Too bad I can’t watch the movie.*

In two minutes, she returned with a small slip of paper, rested it on the bench near the doorway, and scribbled something that resembled “CP 42 Td”. Diane glanced through her lavender primer—no mention of “27/9”. *Guess I must’ve zoned out ’fore Miss G too much.*

She would’ve never advanced at any rate, if not for the dozens of keywords she fed Mr. Bluebird by the month. Case in point: The selections from these secretaries’ gobble-gabble (with no help from Estelle). *Montessori, Jersey, Walwyn, Degas, and...*

Sevton.

“Sevton”?

Wait a sec. Think I heard a rich old lady live dere, din’t I? They say we’re related, right? Now she wished she hadn’t

overlooked her parents' special reports—and a host of travelers' pamphlets in between.

“Trus’ me,” said Roberta, “*this* is where they last spotted the token—and a whole lot more. It’ll take me a while to cram that in.” She revealed the letters of this cache, one at a time, as she transcribed them in tall block type on the other side. “L...L...A...”

But just as she was approaching the fourth one...in came Norissa, face sweating and ankles trembling. At the sound of her clapping, everyone a yard or more off flinched away. Both girls froze as well, and then faced her; judging by the heavy panting, Diane half-expected Elaine. No matter whom she met, the adversary had arrived. Time was definitely up for today...

And for Pete's sake, why didn't Roberta reach her destination any sooner? She loved playing mind games a lot more than the old guards used to.

"This is the *last* button you've pushed here, Miss!" the wunderkind stormed out. "About time I pushed yours back."

"But I din't see y—" retorted Diane.

"It's just an expression," Norissa reminded her. "Now will you please get moving?"

"No way, José!" screeched Diane in defense. "J...jus' leave me alone. I'm so *stayin'* 'til Kingdom come!"

"Not this time you will. Think of why."

But as she stood in somberness and began choking tears, she couldn't.

“Whether you’re aware or not,” resumed Norissa, “it’s your loss.” She whooshed her hands towards her shoulders—the indication for “Now come along”.

Diane let out a whimper. “But, Nor—”

“Enough, worrywart. Before someone locks you up at Danziger.”

Danziger? Never in a thousand!

As it stood, Diane could do nothing more than give Roberta a hand and a hug. In her ideal world, they should’ve reserved those moving trucks down on the street for her—*today*. If not Overly’s, then...another way out.

All for the best, she says. And if you ask me...my worst.

“And just why do you dawdle around here,

anyhow?” Norissa fumed, as she seized Diane’s hand and grasped it by the wrist. “What purpose do you have here, huh? Who do you even know works here?”

The girl felt her stomach cramp, while she stammered her way towards an answer. *What is she, an FBI agent?*

“Exactly. No one—nothing—*nada*. *That’s* why you’re done here.”

“But I gotta know wh—”

“ ‘But’ nothing more!” said Norissa. “You’re scrambling away right now. So say your prayers—*fast*.”

Of course, Diane couldn’t construct the right one in her mind. She only recited “Our Father”, or her family’s simple grace, whenever the occasion called for it.

O Lord, I beg of you: Whatever happen, I'm gon' live all by miself da nex' six months. No parents, no power schemes—no excuses. Forever and ever...Amen.

Indeed, an offer even His angels couldn't refuse. If only she stopped squandering her allowances on Mr. Rittman's johnnycake jamboree and double codfish deluxe—every single Market Day...

Before she took the first step down, Roberta handed her the slip and patted her on the shoulder. Diane sandwiched it inside the spelling notebook, tucked her items away, and walked on with Norissa.

"See ya at the top soon!" the tipster shouted from the Chamber. "I'll give ya the whole scoop when we meet again."

But which one—Barome, Ketellou, Pakritin? The only mountains she could recite on a list—and all that Rogatia offered for hikers. Besides, no one her age could obtain a permit.

Hope dey don' find out at home...'bout anything. And 'lieve me, I know where nex' to go, 'way from the likes of them.

Sure won' be those peaks. And it sure won' be Danziger.

Whatever happen, I'll figure out dem words. I'll figure 'em!

But already, she had her doubts. A long ton of them.

to be continued...

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—Nina Paley, copyheart.org



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